



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: December 17, 2018
To: Chief School Administrators, Charter School and Renaissance School Project Leads
From: Linda P. Eno, Ed.D., Assistant Commissioner
Division of Academics and Performance

Guidance on Early Admission to Kindergarten

The New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE) Division of Early Childhood Education frequently receives inquiries from school districts and parents regarding the cut-off date for entry into kindergarten. This memorandum is designed to assist school districts by providing additional information on issues that commonly arise as related to early entry into kindergarten.

According to the law in New Jersey, a student must be 5 years old by October 1 in order to have a statutory right to enrollment where a kindergarten program is offered by a public school. However, local boards of education can establish policies regarding cut-off dates and age requirements for admission that enable students to begin kindergarten while still age 4 on October 1, in accordance with *N.J.S.A. 18A:38-5*. There are no statutory or regulatory provisions that require pre-entrance testing before a student can be enrolled in kindergarten.

Although it is within the discretion of the school district, the NJDOE recommends that districts adhere to the October 1 cut-off date. The October 1 deadline is statutorily mandated, and as such local school districts do not have any obligation to offer an exception to that deadline. The NJDOE recognizes that parents seeking to have their child accepted into kindergarten early can be persistent in their pursuit and that school districts receive considerable pressure to make accommodations for children who have a date of birth within a few days of the cut-off date, as well as for children who are deemed by their parents to be academically advanced.

While the NJDOE does not recommend the use of testing or screening for early entrance into kindergarten, school districts may choose to accommodate parents by allowing students who do not meet the October 1 deadline to enter kindergarten if the student achieves a certain score on a pre-entrance testing exam. Screening programs are more appropriately used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of students who meet the age requirement and are about to enter kindergarten. Further, when a local school district allows for exceptions to the October 1 cut-off date, there could be the appearance of inequity. For example, if a school district permits one student to "test in" to early kindergarten admission, while not affording the same opportunity to other families, it could be perceived as discriminatory. Additionally, in most cases the testing is conducted by a private testing center that charges a fee for the test. A board policy that permits early entry to kindergarten based on performance on a parent-pay assessment contributes to inequities because not all families have the resources to pay for private testing.

This memorandum is only intended to provide information to assist school districts with parental requests to have a child accepted into early kindergarten enrollment and does not supersede any of the other applicable statutory and regulatory provisions related to kindergarten admissions.

Contact information

To the extent that local boards of education adopt policies that allow early kindergarten admission, those policies should be equitable and applied in a uniform manner.

Districts wanting to discuss their policies can reach out to their NJDOE [County Office of Education](#). Districts can also email their questions to the Division of Early Childhood Education at doeearlychild@doe.nj.gov.

c: Members, State Board of Education
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NJDOE Staff
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Garden State Coalition of Schools
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